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ACTS : THE PRESENT STATUS OF CRITICISM.

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NO LESS noteworthy than in the case of many other of the biblical writings is the wide divergence of opinion among scholars as to the date of the composition of Acts. This date as given by Schwegeler, Zeller, Overbeck, Hausrath, Pfeiderer, and Holtzmann is 100-125 A. D.; by Weizsäcker, Volkmar, and others, about 100 A. D.; by Wendt, 75-100 A. D.; by Hilgenfeld, 95 A. D.; by Harnack, 80-93 A. D.; by Ewald, Weiss, and Lechler, 80 A. D.; by Blass, 63 A. D.; by Volkmar, for the date of the "we"-document, 65 A. D. (the same being elaborated in Acts, chaps. 13-28, at about the beginning of the second century). In the settlement of the whole matter perhaps the most weighty consideration is the certainty that the third gospel was not written until after 70 A. D. Acts, therefore, the continuation of that "former treatise,"¹ would seem to be best assigned to the reign of Domitian (81-96 A. D.), notwithstanding the contention of some scholars that, owing to the pressing need of such books in the Pauline churches, Luke must have published both the gospel and the Acts as soon as possible after the death of Paul in the early sixties.

That at least a portion of Acts may be safely ascribed to Luke, "the beloved physician" of Col. 4:14, is a matter of general agreement among the foremost scholars. The "we"- or "travel"-document is evidently the work of an eyewitness and traveling companion of Paul, written first, it would seem, in the form of a diary of the journeys from Troas to Philippi,² from Philippi to Jerusalem,³ and from Jerusalem to Rome.⁴ The Western Text even appears to contain a trace of this document

¹Acts 1:1.

³Acts 20:5-21:18.

²Acts 16:10-17.

⁴Acts 27:12-28:16.

at 11:28. The common origin of the Acts and of the third gospel is conclusively evidenced by their unity of style and method. The traditional view has even attempted to identify the first person plural of the travel-document with the first person of Luke 1:3. It is well-nigh fatal to this theory that before the entrance of the travel-document Acts shows little certain knowledge either of the Jerusalem church or of the apostolic period; while after the introduction of that document the work goes forward with a vividness and actuality that are in striking contrast to the previous uncertainty and lack of historical trustworthiness (Holtzmann). A pupil and companion of Paul would most naturally have given some prominence to his first significant meeting with the apostle; whereas the writer of Acts does nothing of the kind, although retaining in the travel-document numerous minor details of far less significance. But if this writer used the travel-document as a source, it was to be expected that he would enlarge upon that source from other, more extensive, but less trustworthy material, and with free details of his own, in which he is not always fortunate⁵ (Wendt). Moreover, Acts sometimes fails to show first-hand knowledge, even of the latter part of Paul's career, the period during which the author of the travel-document was intimately associated with Paul. The retention of the first person by the compiler of Acts, who was not himself Paul's fellow-traveler, is easily explained by supposing that such a writer (or compiler) wished to indicate that he was giving the testimony of an eyewitness. That the author of Acts was not the author of the travel-document is the growing opinion of scholars, among whom might be mentioned Holtzmann, Volkmar, Jüngst, Wendt, Clemen, and Sorof; although the hypothesis that Luke himself might easily be ignorant of the affairs of the Jerusalem church and of much of Paul's early life is still ably defended by such critics as B. Weiss, Blass, Zahn, Nösgen, K. Schmidt, Ramsay, and, more recently, Hilgenfeld.

The plan and purpose of Acts are not appropriately indicated by the title "Acts of the Apostles." The book is not

⁵*Cf.* Acts 9:26 ff.

even a biography of Peter and Paul, nor yet a history of the church or of the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome. Moreover, the *Tendenz* theory of a mediating purpose between the Pauline and Petrine factions of the church is now generally rejected. The book is, nevertheless, a literary production of planful and artistic construction, and with a distinct purpose which can be traced from beginning to end. This purpose is to tell of the preaching of the gospel, first to the Jews, and, when they reject it, to the gentiles, in accordance with the promises of God. That the true heirs to salvation are the sons of Abraham according to the spirit—this is the ever-recurring theme of the Acts as well as of the third gospel. The purpose of Acts is primarily religious, rather than historical; its statements and representations cannot be weighed simply and solely according to modern historical standards. To the biblical writers the events related had a divine significance; the very selection of material for their writings was made upon this basis; and the material is constantly presented with less regard for historical accuracy than for the demonstration of the divine origin of Christianity.

It is the task of historical criticism to distinguish between legendary accretion and the historically genuine. Thus the account of the gift of tongues⁶ is assimilated to the Jewish legend of Pentecost, so that it presents quite a different picture of the phenomena of glossolaly from those given by Paul⁷ and elsewhere by Acts itself.⁸ The speech of Gamaliel⁹ shows a serious anachronism in regard to Thendas and Judas (*Zahn, Einleitung*). Paul is represented as beginning his apostleship under the auspices of the Jerusalem church,¹⁰ which is in direct contradiction to Paul's own testimony in Gal., chap. 2. Peter is described as baptizing gentiles and eating with them; in fact, as solving the whole gentile question;¹¹ all of which is very difficult to reconcile with Gal. 2:11 f. The death of Herod Agrippa¹² is attributed to an angel of the Lord, and the nature of his disease

⁶ Acts 2:1-11.

⁹ Acts 5:35-40.

⁷ 1 Cor., chap. 14.

¹⁰ Acts 9:26 ff.

⁸ Acts 2:12 ff.; 10:44-46; 11:14-17.

¹¹ Acts, chap. 10.

¹² Acts 12:23.

is confused with that of Herod the Great, although quite a different account is given by Josephus.¹³ The death of Agrippa also is a sufficient explanation of Peter's release from prison¹⁴ without resort to a miracle. On the other hand, the portrayal of individual character is true to life; minute details, such as those in chap. 12 and elsewhere, all point to an early and trustworthy source. The local coloring is always present; the writer is equally familiar with the topography of Jerusalem, Cæsarea Philippi, Ephesus, and Athens. The legendary accretion and the lack of first-hand information are largely confined to chaps. 1-12; while the accuracy of the travel-document is universally accepted as beyond question.

The character of the speeches recorded in Acts has been clearly shown to be in entire harmony with what we know of the literary methods of the ancient historians, who elaborated the discourses of their characters while at the same time giving a truthful representation of the sources which they were following. The speeches in Acts disclose a similar method of composition, but their early origin is proved from internal evidence. Their entire coloring, their doctrinal standpoint, their Old Testament background, their method of scripture proof, their spirit of longing for the messianic future, as well as their cast of language and customary modes of expression, all have a significance which cannot be mistaken. But the historical accuracy of any particular speech must be determined, not only upon its intrinsic merits, but also upon the basis of the general trustworthiness of the source from which it was derived.

The assumption made by certain scholars that Acts is not a mere compilation, on the ground that the original documents would have been preserved to us had they survived until the end of the first century, is unwarranted. As a matter of fact, these documents have been to a considerable extent preserved to us (in fragmentary form) both in the book of Acts itself and also in the additions of the Western Text, many of which, no doubt, were culled from these same original documents by the early Christian scribes. The author of the third gospel begins his

¹³ *Ant.*, 19, 8, 2.

¹⁴ Acts, chap. 12.

work with a reference to the written sources at his command,¹⁵ and his use of such sources in the composition of the Acts is now a matter of general acceptance. The travel-document itself is such a source, even if we accept Luke as the author of the Acts, who uses in his composition an earlier work from his own pen. This, indeed, is the view of Ramsay, Blass, Weiss, Hilgenfeld, and others. Hilgenfeld finds three distinct sources, or three little books, as follows: (A) the Acts of Peter, on the origin and growth of the Jerusalem church under Peter and the other apostles before the persecution; (B) the Acts of the Seven, a history of the seven deacons in their relation to the Hellenists, whence comes the history of Stephen and Philip; (C) the Acts of Paul, a work by Luke himself, who was an eyewitness of much that he described, and who later conceived the idea of writing "the Acts of the Apostles" by adding parts of A and B to his own former work, C, and by subjecting the whole to considerable alteration and revision until it came to its present form.¹⁶ Spitta discovers two sources, A and B, put together by a redactor (R). The first source, A, which includes the travel-document as well as chaps. 22 and 26, he assigns to Luke. The second source, B, he distinguishes on the basis of its interest in the miraculous; it is consequently of less historical value than A. Jüngst attempts a similar analysis, which differs somewhat in detail. Sorof makes Timothy the author of the travel-document, and also its editor; who combines it with an original work by Luke and with an early Petrine source. These ingenious analyses are hardly trustworthy. They have been gravely questioned by Wrede, Zöckler, and Jülicher, and they generally go to prove that such minute unraveling of sources is precarious. Yet it is quite certain that the author (or compiler) stood much farther removed from the events described in Part I (chaps. 1-12) than from those of Part II (chaps. 13-28).¹⁷

The results which stand established as the outcome of the most recent criticism of the sources are as follows: In Part I

¹⁵ Luke 1:1.

¹⁶ HILGENFELD, *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1895-8.

¹⁷ Cf. HOLTZMANN, *Die Apostelgeschichte*.

there is plainly traceable a source of Jewish-Christian origin, strikingly Hebraistic and Palestinian in style, and representing the primitive Petrine doctrine.¹⁸ That an Aramaic original lay back of this source seems highly probable. A second source is evidenced by the duplication of certain narratives, in each instance with a different conception of the facts.¹⁹ Chaps. 6—9 : 31 form a distinct section showing the two results of the persecution; while 9 : 32—11 : 30 resembles chaps. 1—5 in being essentially Petrine.²⁰ In 11 : 19—30 the hand of a pragmatic editor is apparent in a rather unskilful attempt to combine several different sources. Chap. 12 also springs from an early Petrine document.

Underlying Part II an extensive and trustworthy source is discernible, of which the travel-document is a part. Of this, no doubt, the Acts writer omitted large sections which did not suit his purpose. In immediate connection with the travel-document are elements that are evidently inferior to it in historical credibility.²¹ It is on such grounds as these that many critics deny that the travel-document constituted originally a part of the extensive source used in Part II. But the existence of this source in some form or other has not been successfully challenged.

There still remains room for investigation into the relation of the author of Acts to the Pauline epistles. Probably it never occurred to him to use these letters as an historical source, or even to read them from the historical standpoint. At any rate, he seems to have had at hand an abundance of other material which he judged better suited to his purpose. Whether he wrote in 80 or 120 A. D., it is almost inconceivable that, being such a Christian as he was, he could have been entirely ignorant of the epistles. But if the author of the travel-document was actually an eyewitness, and a companion of Paul, he would, of course, write from personal recollection and out of knowledge derived from Paul himself. As for the author of Acts, he shows that he was neither acquainted with Paul nor attempted any harmonization with the Pauline writings.

¹⁸ See Acts, chaps. 1—5. ¹⁹ Acts 4 : 32—5 : 11 (*cf.* 2 : 43—46); 5 : 17—42 (*cf.* 4 : 1—31).

²⁰ *Cf.* the *Κήρυγμα Πέτρου* according to Jerome, and the *Διδαχὴ Πέτρου* according to Origen.

²¹ Acts 16 : 19 ff., especially vss. 25—34; also 28 : 21 f.; *cf.* de Wette, Holtzmann, Weizsäcker, Wendt, McGiffert.